**Darvills Hill Farm**

A word on flerds at Darvills Hill Farm

By Charlotte Downing

For the past four years our small family farm, at the far end of Flowers Bottom Lane, has been home to a flock of mixed rare breed ewes, their lambs and our two Soay rams Chesyne (the One and Only) and more recently Ken Enough. Our ambition however has always been to bring cattle back onto the farm and finally, having installed all the necessary infrastructure in the way of fencing, gates, water and cattle crush (a medieval looking but necessary animal handling system), we are ready to welcome a handful of bovine boys.

I wasn't entirely confident about what we would get if I mixed our flock of sheep with a herd of cows, but I was reassured by You Tube sensation and relentlessly optimistic regenerative Missouri farmer Greg Judy, that it is something called a ‘flerd’.

This word was only recently added to the Oxford English dictionary but it describes a process that has been around for millennia, and for as long as grassland habitats have been in existence. In the wild, diverse varieties of herbivores form a cohesive unit grazing and moving together, to keep safe from predators. When animals were domesticated, they were still grazed together as farmers instinctively understood that cattle and sheep have different grazing methods which are not only compatible, but positively enhance the biodiversity in the soil and pastures on which they are kept.

This traditional knowledge has got a little lost in recent decades in the race to intensify agriculture, however it is becoming more commonplace again. Our ambition to work with nature, creating more space for diversity on the farm means we are well placed to undertake this form of pastoralism. Our cattle will be a slow growing, hardy breed as they will be living outdoors on pasture all year round, just as nature intended. Once our ewes have finished lambing this May, we will slowly be introducing them to their ruminant relatives. I’m now wondering what you get if you mix a brood of chickens with a flerd? Answers on a postcard please.